CEDAR RIDGE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 10,009 acres

The Cedar Ridge WSA (NV-010-088), located approximately 23 miles south of Elko, Nevada, is near the south end of Cedar Ridge. Bladed dirt roads form the west and south boundaries. A rugged, but easily identifiable, 4-wheel drive road forms the north boundary. A fence line and a vehicle way make up the eastern boundary. The WSA is comprised entirely of public lands.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE -

0 acres recommended for wilderness
10,009 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The 10,009-acre Cedar Ridge WSA is not recommended for wilderness. The WSA has high woodland products values, high potential for oil and gas, and moderate potentials for uranium and barite. The area would be difficult to manage under a wilderness designation. The availability of woodland products, oil and gas, and minerals is considered more important than the less than outstanding wilderness values.

Naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude are limited to small areas within the WSA. Unsubstantial, but inescapable, stumpage from years of woodcutting is evident throughout much of the WSA. Three allotment boundary fences, two of which are bladed, detract from the area's naturalness. Although topographic and vegetative screening provides opportunities for solitude, the quality is diminished by sights and sounds outside the WSA. Additionally, the sounds of low-flying military jets within the two Military Training Routes affect the entire WSA.

The WSA does not contain any outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Although the WSA could be managed as wilderness, it would be difficult and would require extensive fencing, signing, and vehicle barriers, in addition to constant and intensive patrolling. The area's history of woodcutting would probably cause many woodcutting trespasses.

The area contains a very high value woodland resource of 4,940 acres of pinyon pine and Utah juniper. As one of only three woodland areas close to Elko, the demand for this resource is high. The recommendation would make these resources available for harvest.

The WSA has high potential for oil and gas and moderate potential for precious metals, barite and uranium. The recommendation allows access to explore these for potential resources.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA appears natural. Elevations range from 5,613 to 7,149 feet. The east side of the ridge is severely eroded and gullied, while the west side is an uptilted deeply-dissected bench. Vegetation consists of dense stands of junipers and sagebrush. There is no surface water. There are two bladed fence lines, one additional fence, six pit reservoirs and three vehicle ways totalling about five miles. The ways are more noticeable than the pit reservoirs. The WSA contains extensive evidence from over a hundred years of woodcutting. The imprint of man's work is subtle and possible to escape in much of the area, but is not entirely avoidable. Naturalness is not outstanding.

B. Solitude: While the WSA contains sufficient topographic and vegetative screening to provide opportunities for solitude, the quality is only fair to good because of outside influences. The best opportunity for solitude would occur in an area west of the ridge where deeply dissected drainages occur with dense pinyon-juniper trees.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The WSA lacks outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The WSA lacks water and challenging hiking terrain. While camping opportunities exist, the lack of water and interesting or unique features discourages this use. Small populations and low wildlife diversity provide very limited hunting or wildlife observation opportunities. Horseback riding opportunities are fair to very good although not challenging nor attractive. Access is very good from almost any point around the unit.

D. Special Features: The WSA does not contain any special features.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The WSA could be managed as wilderness, but it would be hard to protect the area's resources. There are no private inholdings, cherrystem roads or valid rights. The extreme pressure from nonconforming woodcutting would make long-term management extremely difficult. The effort necessary to effectively contain this pressure would require extensive fencing, signing, vehicle barriers, and constant patrols and could impair the wilderness values. Wood harvesting has been a long-term historical use. Good access routes almost completely surrounded the WSA and cross-country vehicle travel within the WSA is easy.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The WSA has high oil and gas potential. This potential is based on favorable oil maturation levels, excellent source rocks, nearby oil production and shows, and a favorable structural setting. The entire WSA would probably be leased, if available for leasing, because of past leasing, nearby seismic exploration, and industry interest.

The WSA has moderate potential for precious metals and uranium. The eastern portion is classified as moderately favorable for precious metals and barite. Most of the WSA contains favorable uranium host rocks. The WSA has low to no potential for other locatable minerals. As of January 1990, there were no mining claims in the WSA.

The WSA is unfavorable for geothermal resources. All other leasable minerals, except oil and gas, are unlikely to occur.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC PUBLIC COMMENTS

The BLM received 31 comments on the draft EIS; 16 mentioned wilderness. Eight of these comments were specific to the Red Spring WSA. Five supported the BLM's no wilderness proposal. Three preferred wilderness designation for the entire WSA.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, USGS, Fish and Wildlife Service, and EPA commented on the draft EIS, but had no specific comments on this WSA. The Governor of Nevada's consistency review concurred with the BLM's recommendation.

The BLM received one comment on the Elko Final Wilderness EIS; the EPA addressed wilderness recommendations for other WSAs.